1: Grigson G-5 · (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32

rail-head below the Eastern Ghat mountains to Jeypore and the Bastar border was continued thence to Jagdalpur; subsequently roads have gradually been driven westward to Dantewara, Bijapur, Kutru and Bhopalpatnam, and southward to Sukma and Konta; the most recent development has been many miles of forest roads, constructed either as feeder roads to the Raipur and Rajnandgaon roads, or to link up the forests of Dantewara and the south with the Godavari at Tarlagudam, Cherla and Dummagudam or the Kolab-Sabari at Mismagudam and Konta. The Raipur road is now motorable throughout the year, and there is a daily mail and passenger service by it to Kanker and Dhamtari. A railway connexion with the new Raipur-Vizianagram line has been surveyed, and would have been under construction but for the world-wide financial depression. The revenue of the State has risen from about Rs. 30,000 in 1855, then received in kind or in cowry shells at a rate of 2,880 to the rupee, to well over a million rupees.

So the old order is doomed; and with the motor-bus abroad in the land and scores of aboriginals every month seeking work on the public works of the State, in the Assam tea gardens or in the towns of the Godavari valley, with the railway administration feeling this last great blank of 300 miles from Raipur to Salur by 250 from Titlagarh in Kalahandi State to Singareni in Hyderabad a slur to be removed as soon as funds permit, change comes ever faster. My successors and I, like our predecessors, are guilty of accelerating change; but we can on the one hand plead that when we came a return to the old isolation was not practical politics, and on the other that we have tried before it was too late to strengthen and revive the old tribal *panchayat* organization and restore its jurisdiction in civil and in all but serious criminal offences, to check the drunkenness made rampant by a bad excise system, to prevent the further bestowal of aboriginal villages on alien *thekadars* (lessees) and to make the post of village headman one of honour and responsibility instead of one to be held reluctantly by some dummy with no influence in the village, to abolish *bisaha*, to deprive village lessees of the right of taking forced labour, to minimize the right of officials to take it and to regulate the still necessary State demands for road and other labour so as to inconvenience the cultivator as little as possible, to see that it is paid for, and to abolish bondservice. Much of great interest could be written on the effects and reactions of the administrative measures of the last fifty years sketched in these last few pages. But the purpose of this book is to place on record while there is yet time an account of the way of life prevalent among the Maria tribes of Bastar, perhaps now the most primitive

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32

tribes between the Godavari and the Ganges. Little has been written about them, or indeed about the great Gond race as a whole. My experience has been in going from the backwoods of Bastar to a modern Indian district like Nagpur that even there there is a great substratum of primitive thought, religion and practice which has been illuminated for me by what I learnt in Bastar.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

PREFACE

THE subject of this book is the ghotul, the village dormitory, the bothie, the bachelors' hall—*Jünglingshaus* is an attractive German word used recently by Ruben—of the Muria of Bastar State. Similar institutions are widely distributed among communities of the Austro-Asiatic cultures, though none have been studied in sufficient detail for full comparison. But on the existing evidence it seems probable that the Bastar ghotul is one of the most highly developed and carefully organized in the world. For what is a village guardroom for the Naga, a boys' club among the Uraon, a refuge for temporary sexual association in Indonesia, is for the Muria the centre of social and religious life.

The study of an institution that is related functionally to every aspect of a tribe's life presents certain technical difficulties of presentation. The culture pattern must be developed in due order; but this means that there will be many references in the earlier chapters that can only be explained later on. A book of this kind, where everything fits in, which describes a culture that is integrated and intelligible, has to be read in bulk—as it were—rather than in sequence. For the reader's convenience, therefore, I give here a brief introductory account of the ghotul in the light of which Part I must be read.

The Muria ghotul is an institution, tracing its origin to Lingo Pen, a famous cult-hero of the Gond, of which all the unmarried boys and girls of the tribe must be members. This membership is carefully organized; after a period of testing, boys and girls are initiated and given a special title which carries with it a graded rank and social duties. Leaders are appointed to organise and discipline the society; throughout this book I call the boys' leader the Sirdar and the girls' leader the Belosa. Boy members are known as chelik and girl members as motiari. The relations between chelik and motiari are governed by the type of ghotul to which they belong. Two distinct types of organization are recognized. In the older, classical, type of ghotul, boys and girls pair off in a more or less permanent relationship which lasts till marriage. They are often 'married' and cohabit in the dormitory for several years. In the more modern form of ghotul, such exclusive associations are forbidden and partners must constantly be changed.

Chelik and motiari have important duties to perform on all social occasions. The boys act as acolytes at festivals, the girls as bridesmaids at weddings. Both dance before the clan-god and at the great fairs. They form a choir at the funerals of important people. Their games and dances enliven village life and redeem it from the crushing monotony that is its normal characteristic in other parts of India.

The intimate association of the ghotul with every aspect of Muria life means, of course, that we must study the whole of that life in less or greater detail. The ghotul must be put in its place. For this reason I have divided the book into two Parts. Part I gives the setting and background, Part II describes the life of the chelik and motiari in detail.

In Part I, I begin with a description of the geopolitical background of the tribe, and give a brief account of the three elements that compose it—the Dhoria, who are Hill Maria now settled in the plains, the Muria immigrants from the north, and the very old aboriginal population of eastern Kondagaon. In Chapter II, I describe the economic life of the Muria; the ghotul is only a night club; all day its members are engrossed in the quest for food and drink. The chelik are kept busy in both axe- and plough-cultivation, hunting, fishing,

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943

AW32 Gond AW32

Bison Horn Maria

Muria

PREFACE

[2] This book is a contribution to social anthropology rather than to the study of crime. For many of the tragedies here are not crimes in any intelligible sense, though in our present state of dealing with such matters we treat them as if they were. In the second place, I have naturally approached the subject from the angle that was most familiar to me. I am neither an administrator, a lawyer nor a policeman. In dealing with crime this is a great disadvantage. It is specially so in India where these simple village crimes offer few problems of detection, and where it is impossible to study the general reaction of society through the columns of the daily press or in such revealing impulses of compassion as petitions for reprieve. It is only rarely that anything like a detective problem with clues and counter-clues is set for the police. It is equally rare for interesting points of law to arise during a trial. In the great majority of cases the accused confesses. But this does not mean that these aboriginal crimes have no importance. It is of absorbing sociological and psychological interest to study the reasons that drive unsophisticated, primitive men to kill and wound their fellows; and their behaviour afterwards, as well as the conduct of everyone concerned, is of almost equal importance.

184 While I was collecting material for my book *The Muria and their Ghotul*, I was greatly struck by the difference in the incidence of crime between them and the great Maria tribe to the south. For homicide the annual incidence to the million is only 21 among the Muria, while it is 69 among the Bison-horn Maria; for suicide it is 22 against 53. In the last 10 years there have only been 21 Muria murders, and a large number of these have occurred either on the boundaries of the State or in the Mardapal Pargana in the extreme south of the Muria area, bordering on the Maria territory. The Muria differ from the Maria in the quite extraordinary absence of jealousy among them, in their lack of attachment to property and personal possessions, in their very strong civic and social instincts, in their gentleness and kindness. I believe that this difference is largely due to the

[p. xiv]

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

past taken the title of Dorla. Others again are known as Koya, and a few call themselves Gond. When I was in Konta, the very wild Maria there said, 'We are not Maria. That is the name of the uncivilized fellows in Dantewara'. When I was in Dantewara, the equally wild Maria there indignantly rejected the old name which, they said, was only properly given to the savages of Konta. The expression 'Bison-horn Maria' is an obvious linguistic makeshift. Another name for the tribe is Dandami Maria. But I have never heard this used by the people themselves, and many do not know what it means. The name 'Bison-horn Maria' is derived from the tribe's custom of using a magnificent head-dress of bison-horns for their marriage dances, and possibly 'Tallagulda Maria' or even 'Sing Maria' (an expression in actual use) would preserve both the descriptiveness of the title and linguistic propriety. But for the time being I have continued to use the very convenient term, Bison-horn Maria, and throughout this book it will be understood that, wherever the word 'Maria' is used without qualification, it is to the Bison-horn and not the Hill variety of the tribe that I refer.

It will be evident, however, that official records, which are not concerned with scientific classification, were not likely to preserve these nice distinctions between one tribe and another, and I was at first provided with a very large number of files, many of which had nothing to do with the Bison-horn Maria at all. I think it is not unlikely that the bad reputation of this tribe for violence is, to some extent, due to the fact that a number of people who do not belong to it are included when statistics are compiled. However, at last, after much sifting and sorting, I found that I had a collection of 103 records of Bison-horn Maria homicides covering the years 1921 to 1941. During this period there must have been nearly 250 such cases altogether, but some of the files had been eliminated and others for one reason or another were not available. However, 103 was a very fair sample. For convenience I omitted the last 3 cases, and was thus left with a set of 100 taken entirely at random, distributed throughout the period under review and taken from every part of the area.

It was rather more difficult to get records of suicide, for

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

127 these were not kept at the headquarters of the State, but
121 distributed in the police stations and many of them had been eliminated. But the State Superintendent of Police called in as many aboriginal files as could be found, and again after much sifting I found myself with exactly 50 unselected Bison-horn Maria suicide records. These extended over a period of 10 years.

114 Between 1935 and 1942 I made many tours in this enchanting land among these enchanting people. On the earlier tours I was accompanied by my friend Mr Shamrao Hivale whose amazing sympathy and insight helped me to catch my first vision of Maria culture. Later I had the support of my wife who, being herself a Gond, was able to get quickly in touch with the people and immediately established a friendly atmosphere. Particularly in the later tours I tried to see as many scenes of violence as possible, to talk to released convicts and to discover the general attitude of a village towards any crime that had been committed within its boundaries. In Aranpur I stood beside the still warm ashes of the ritually-cremated clothes of Barse Chewa who had recently been hanged in jail. At Khutepal, I watched Oyami Masa's children playing on the very floor once stained by the blood of his murdered wife. In the forest near Jabeli [211] I had a clearing made so that I could photograph the carved pillar erected in memory of a famous murderer. In Rewali I was visited by a ferocious-looking youth who had twice stood on trial for his life and had twice preserved it. Here too I talked with Hemla Bakka who killed his wife for infidelity and was now unable to get another. In Doriras I saw the grave of the murdered Boti which had been desecrated by [764] Ghasia for the sake of the purse of money which had been buried to help the dead man on his journey to the other world. In the same village I visited the home of Kawasi Borga then serving a life sentence, and talked to his fine sons and his sad pathetic wife.

124 Later I spent many hours in the Jagdalpur Jail talking to Maria who were serving terms of life-imprisonment for homicide. Some of them were as informative as the limits of their psychology allowed, for it must always be remembered that aboriginals are not accustomed to discussing those matters which are of special interest to anthropologists. Other

4: Fürer-Haimendorf E-5 (1942-1945) 1948
AW32 Gond AW32

and many of Elwin's recent articles deal partly or entirely with Gonds.[1] Numerous specimens of the oral literature of Gondwana are recorded in Elwin's excellent collections *Folk-Tales of Mahakoshal* and *Folk-Songs of the Maikal Hills*[2] and Shamrao Hivale, the co-author of the latter book, has made a valuable contribution to our knowledge of Gond culture by his monograph *The Pardhans of the Upper Narbhada Valley*.[3] But the most important work so far written on any Gond tribe is Verrier Elwin's monumental volume, *The Maria and their Gotul*.[4]

Grigson's and Elwin's great monographs both deal with the Gonds of Bastar, and no comparable account exists of the Raj Gonds of the Central Provinces and Hyderabad.[5] While perhaps less colourful than the hill-folks of Bastar, they occupy so important and central a position among the Gondi speaking tribes that lacking a detailed knowledge of Raj Gond culture and tradition we seem far from a solution of the Gond problem.

It was this idea which first led me to the study of the Raj Gonds in the country between the Godavari and the Penganga. When I had completed my work among the Hill Reddis of the Eastern Ghats it might have seemed logical to embark on a study of the Koyas, who are the immediate neighbours of the Reddis both on the Hyderabad and on the British side of the Godavari. For this would have rounded off the work among those aboriginal tribes of the Nizam's Dominions which lie entirely within the Telugu sphere. But judging from my limited experience of Koyas, both Gondi and Telugu speaking, I felt that it would be difficult to understand their cultural life without some knowledge of Gond culture in an area less exposed to the influence of a dominant alien civilization. So I turned northwards to where the Adilabad District, with its more than 70,000 Gonds, promised a rich field for ethnological research. I hoped that a study of these Gonds would lead more directly to the heart of the Gond problem than work among the Koyas on the periphery of the Gondi speaking area.

In December 1941 my wife and I arrived in Asifabad and undertook an informative tour through the three taluqs Asifabad, Utnur and Rajura. Travelling on foot westwards through the Pedda Vagu valley as far as Kerimeri we gained a first impression of villages where Gonds

1. 'I married a Gond.' *Man in India*, Vol. XX, 1940, pp. 228-253;—'Primitive Ideas on Menstruation and the Climacteric in Central India,' in *Essays in Anthropology presented to R. B. Sarat Chandra Roy*, Lucknow 1942, pp. 141—157.—'Conception, Pregnancy and Birth among the Tribesmen of the Maikal Hills,' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Bengal*, Vol. IX, 1943, pp. 99-148.—'The Attitude of Indian Aboriginals to Sexual Impotence,' *Man in India*, Vol. XXIII, 1943, pp. 127-146.—'Folklore of the Bastar Clan-Gods,' *Man*, Vol. XLIII, 1943, pp. 97-104.—'Salt-Walking among the Muria of Bastar State,' *Man* Vol. XLIV, 1944, pp. 38-41.

2. Bombay 1944.

3. Bombay 1945.

4. Bombay 1947.

5. Syed Siraj-al-Hassan's *The Castes and Tribes of H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions* (Bombay 1920) contains only a brief article on the Raj Gonds of Adilabad District, pp. 216-232.